

Message Text

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TO AMEMBASSY ROME IMMEDIATE

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FOLLOWING REPEAT VALLETTA 71 ACTION SECSTATE INFO NATO 19
JAN

QUOTE

C O N F I D E N T I A L VALLETTA 0071

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, MT, NATO

SUBJECT: US POLICY TOWARD MALTA: SUGGESTIONS FOR NATO
STUDY IN 1976

REF: (A) 75 USNATO 6665; (B) CIRC WE-1-76, PAGE 4, QUESTION 13

1. WITHOUT ATTEMPTING TO PREJUDGE THE DEPARTMENT'S
RESPONSE TO REFTEL, I BELIEVE ALL CONCERNED SHOULD BE
AWARE THAT IF WE DO NOT MOVE FORWARD ALONG THE LINES
SUGGESTED THEREIN FAIRLY SOON THE ITALIANS ARE VERY
LIKELY TO TAKE THE INITIATIVE THEMSELVES--BOTH
BILATERALLY AND IN NATO.

2. MY CONVERSATIONS WITH ITALIAN AMBASSADOR TO MALTA
DA RIN MAKE CLEAR THAT ITALIAN CONCERN OVER "WHITHER
MALTA IN POST-1979" IS GROWING. PRIME MINISTER MINTOFF,
DESPITE SOME PROFESSIONS OF LITTLE OR NO CONCERN OVER
THIS TOPIC, IS IN FACT ALSO WORRIED AND APPARENTLY
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URGING THE ITALIANS TO PRESSURE THEIR WESTERN ALLIES

TO CLARIFY THEIR POST - 1979 INTENTIONS RE MALTA AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. MINTOFF'S HOPE IS PRESUMABLY TO GET SOMETHING HE CAN USE IN THE FORTHCOMING 1976 MALTESE GENERAL ELECTION. MALTA'S FUTURE SECURITY POLICY (AND THE RELATED ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES OF THE BRITISH DEPARTURE) WILL BE A MAJOR ISSUE IN THE ELECTION, AND MINTOFF WOULD LIKE TO HOLD AS MANY CARDS AS POSSIBLE IN THE CAMPAIGN.

3. WITH ITALIAN PRESIDENT LEONE, IN EARLY DECEMBER, MINTOFF WAS ADAMANT THAT THERE COULD BE NO MILITARY PRESENCE HERE OF ANY KIND ONCE THE BRITISH LEAVE. WITH GERMAN FOREIGN MINISTER GENSCHER IN BONN (ACCORDING TO ITALIAN INFORMATION), LATER IN DECEMBER, MINTOFF APPARENTLY HEDGED A BIT, SAYING THAT HE WOULD "PREFER" NOT TO HAVE ANY KIND OF MILITARY PRESENCE. WHAT THIS PROBABLY MEANS IS THAT WHILE MINTOFF GENUINELY WANTS TO BE SHED OF MALTA'S "FORTRESS IMAGE" AND ANY KIND OF FOREIGN MILITARY PRESENCE, HE HAS NOT YET FORMULATED A VIABLE PLAN OF HIS OWN ON HOW HE COULD DO WITHOUT SUCH A PRESENCE AND THE SECURITY, INCOME AND EMPLOYMENT IT PROVIDES MALTA. WE WOULD THEREFORE PROBABLY BE WISE NOT TO RULE OUT COMPLETELY THE POSSIBILITY OF THE MALTESE SEEKING OR AT LEAST ACCEPTING THE CONTINUANCE OF SOME SUCH PRESENCE HERE AFTER 1979.

4. DA RIN TELLS ME THAT ROME IS WORRIED ABOUT THE FORTHCOMING LOSS TO THE WEST OF THE EXTREMELY VALUABLE BRITISH MILITARY PRESENCE HERE, PARTICULARLY THE AIR RECONNAISSANCE NOW BEING CARRIED OUT BY THE TWO MALTA-BASED RAF SQUADRONS. (ALTHOUGH SUCH RECONNAISSANCE COULD PRESUMABLY BE CARRIED OUT FROM SICILY AFTER THE BRITISH LEAVE MALTA.) DA RIN IS CONTINUING TO RECOMMEND STRONGLY THAT THE ITALIAN AND FRENCH DEFENSE MINISTERS DISCUSS THIS PROBLEM WHEN THEY MEET ON JANUARY 20. DESPITE THE FALL OF THE MORO GOVERNMENT AND THE CURRENT POLITICAL INSTABILITY IN ITALY, HE REMAINS HOPEFUL THAT THE MEETING WILL TAKE PLACE.
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5. THE ITALIANS ARE ALSO GEARING UP TO RAISE MALTA WITHIN NATO, BUT ARE NOT OVERLY SANGUINE THAT MJCH NATO ATTENTION CAN BE FOCUSED ON IT IN THE SHORT RUN BECAUSE (A) 1979 SEEMS A LONG WAY OFF (ALTHOUGH THE BEGINNING OF THE BRITISH DRAW-DOWN IN THE SPRING OF 1977 IS NOT), AND (B) THE GENERAL ELECTION HERE SOMETIME IN THE NEXT TEN MONTHS COULD RESULT,

THEORETICALLY AT LEAST, IN THE LECTION TO POWER
OF THE NATIONALIST OPPOSITION WITH ITS STRONG PRO-WEST,
PRO-NATO OUTLOOK. SHOULD THIS HAPPEN, NATO WOULD
HAVE TO CONSIDER AN ENTIRELY DIFFERENT SET OF OPTIONS,
ALTHOUGH THE BASIC QUESTION WOULD REMAIN: "HOW
MUCH IS MALTA WORTH TO NATO?"

6. PROBABLY MORE LIKELY, HOWEVER, IS THAT MINTOFF
WILL REMAIN IN POWER. IN THAT EVENT, UNLESS WE
AND NATO HAVE THOUGHT THE PROBLEM THROUGH ALONG THE
LINES OF REFTEL, THE STAGE WILL BE SET FOR MINOTFF
TO RESORT TO THE SAME BLACKMAILING TACTICS HE USED
IN THE 1971-72 BASE NEGOTIATIONS.THERE TACTICS
WORKED FOR HIM BEFORE, AND THERE IS NO REASON WHAT-
EVER TO THINK THAT HE WOULD NOT USE THEM AGAIN.

7. COMMENT: WE ARE IN NO POSITION HERE TO JUDGE
THE PROS AND CONS OF THE ITALIANS GETTING OUT IN
FRONT ON THIS QUESTION IN NATO. BECAUSE OF THE
CURRENT POLITICAL PROBLEMS IN ITALY, HOWEVER, AND
THE PAST AND PRESENT ITALIAN TENDENCY TO BITE OFF
MORE RE MALTA THAN THE REST OF US MIGHT WANT TO
CHEW, WE SEE SOME PROBLEMS WITH IT. VIEWED FROM
HERE, THEREFORE, USNATO'S EXCELLENT 6665 SEEMS TO
US TO BE A VERY SOUND APPROACH. SMITH UNQUOTE SISCO

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